

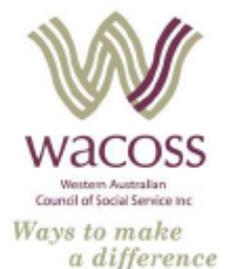


Issues Paper – Excerpt

Companion to the WACOSS Pre-Budget Submission

Investing in Outcomes
Making it Count for the People of WA

**Part One – Issues and Funding Pressures in the Community Services Sector
People with Disabilities**



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*Part One – Issues and Funding Pressures in the Community Services Sector
People with Disabilities*

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PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Background

People with disabilities are among the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

“Disability can cause poverty by preventing the full participation of disabled people in the economic and social life of their communities, especially if the proper supports and accommodations are not available.”¹

In 2003 over 405,000 West Australians, or 21 per cent of the state’s population, were living with a disability. More than 115,800 of these people had a profound or severe core activity limitation and required assistance with basic life tasks such as bathing, moving about and communicating with others.² Many people with a disability are unable to access health and education services, participate in the workforce or be actively involved in the community. As a result they are likely to face an increased risk of poverty and social isolation.³

The ABS projects that the number of people 65 years and over living with disability in WA will increase substantially between 2006 and 2026. This is because of the ageing population as the ‘baby boomers’ move into age groups where disability is more prevalent. The State’s population is forecast to increase 24 per cent in the 20 years to 2026. The overall number of people aged 65 and over with a disability is forecast to increase 115.7 per cent, from 136,700 in 2006 to 294,800 in 2026, an annual increase of 3.9 per cent.⁴

The Council of Australian Government (COAG) has recognised the importance enhancing the quality of life of people with a disability so they can participate as valued members of the community. The COAG National Disability Agreement should continue to contribute to the following outcomes:

- a) *People with disability achieve economic participation and social inclusion; and*
- b) *People with disability enjoy choice, wellbeing and the opportunity to live as independently as possible; and*
- c) *Families and carers are well supported.*⁵

Issues

Consumer Advocacy

Greater funding is required for disability advocacy services to represent the growing number of people living with a disability in WA. In 2003 there were 405, 500 people with a disability in Western Australia representing 21% of the state population. Between 1998 and 2003 the number of people with a disability in Western Australia increased by 50,000 (14%). While most people with a disability received some form of assistance, just over one quarter (26%) need more help. The proportion of

¹ The World Bank. Data and Statistics on Disability. <http://web.worldbank.org/>

² Disability Services Commission. Disability in Western Australia

³ ACOSS News. ACOSS and members Welcome Social Inclusion Commitment. April 2008 Australian Federation of Disability Organisations CEO Jeremy Muir

⁴ Disability Services Commission. Trends and projections in disability in Western Australia 2006.

⁵ Council of Australian Governments. National Disability Agreement. 2008, p.4.

those with an unmet need rose with the severity of disability. Almost half (45%) of those with a profound or severe core-activity restriction have their needs for assistance only partially met.⁶

Advocacy services in the disability sector provide individual and systemic support ensuring that the rights and interests of people with disabilities and their families are being upheld. Past experience has highlighted the effectiveness of professional advocacy support. For example, as the WA sector moves from block funding arrangements to individual funding, the pressure on the service providers to conform to funding requirements has resulted in often unfair and unjust negative impacts on residents losing their home due to an inflexible policy. Advocacy services provide the safety net for individuals who often struggle to have their voices heard.⁷

WACOSS recommends that the State Government invest in disability advocacy services to ensure that people with disabilities and their families truly benefit from increases to disability service provision. Increased funding for disability advocacy services will ensure that people with disabilities and their families are treated fairly and are able to benefit from increased services in the disability sector.

There is also a need for government to increase the policy and research capacity within the disability sector. By supporting community service agencies and their staff to build and sustain a greater capacity to carryout research it would enable them to participate in the Disability Services Commission's Research Network. The Research Network aims to:

- improve access to research findings;
- contribute to a greater understanding of disability issues;
- provide an opportunity for the exchange of information; and
- foster collaboration between researchers.”⁸

Community service providers need to be empowered if they are to take advantage of existing networks and participate in research agendas.

Consumer Engagement

WACOSS welcomes the State Government's creation of the Community Building Steering Group to progress recommendations 11, self-directed service design, from the EAC Report, *Putting the Public First*. The self-directed service model has a long history in the disabilities sector through the Local Area Coordinator program. The expansion of the self-directed service model would be a positive move toward creating greater consumer engagement across the broader community. Greater consumer engagement recognises and values the experiences of people living with disabilities. People on the ground know the issues people with disabilities live with and are better placed to inform government policy. Consumer engagement recognises the importance of consumer

⁶ Feature Article - Disability, ageing and carers in Western Australia. June Quarter 2005 issue of Western Australian Statistical Indicators, ABS Catalogue Number 1367.5

⁷ The Government of Western Australia. 2009/10 Budget Statement. Budget Paper No. 2. Volume 2. May 2009.

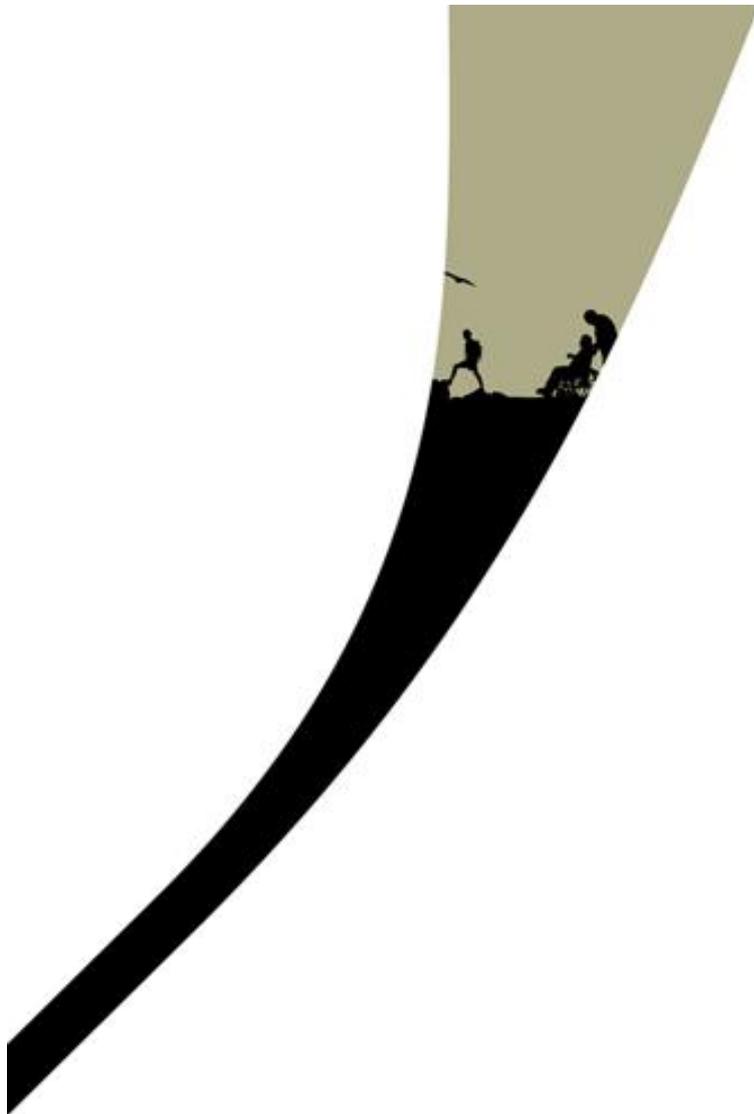
⁸ Disabilities Services Commission. See <http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/researchnetwork.html>

representation in decision making and that citizens need to be included in discussions at all levels of decision making.

The EAC identified the following benefits in moving toward a self-directed service model:

- Empowering citizens to make decisions about their own lives.
- Improving outcomes for citizens at equal or lesser cost.
- Tapping into a broader pool of knowledge and resources.
- Creating greater levels of self-reliance and responsibility.
- Facilitating greater trust in government.

A service model based on engaging consumers will empower individuals and communities to make their own decisions and will more effectively meet people's needs. As the EAC Report stated, service delivery systems need to be built around the aspirations of citizens rather than public sector structures.⁹



⁹ EAC. *Putting the Public First*, p.50.